

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**NUCLEAR STRATEGY WITH THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN**

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ABSTRACT

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The bad relationship between the United States and Iran began in 1979 when radical students stormed the United States Embassy in Tehran and took hostages. The hostage standoff lasted 444 days; and surely, the crisis helped President Carter lose his reelection bid. In President George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union address, he named Iran as one of the nations in the "axis of evil." In December 2002, Russia agreed to assist Iran with nuclear power. The resulting Bushehr Nuclear Power Facility is an enormous cause for U.S. concern. Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NNPT), and it adamantly insists the nuclear program is merely for power generation. The United States fervently opposes the Bushehr venture due to the possibility of nuclear weapons production. These facts and many more provide a history of distrust and poor relations between the two countries. This study will examine strategies the U.S. could use regarding the growing threat Iran's nuclear program poses. The study will draw conclusions as to which strategy might be effective when dealing with Iran.

NUCLEAR STRATEGY WITH THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

The gravest danger to freedom lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology—when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention, and have been caught seeking these terrible weapons. They want the capability to blackmail us, or to harm us, or to harm our friends—and we will oppose them with all our power.

- President George W. Bush
West Point, New York\
June 1, 2002

Today's national security threats stand in stark contrast to the Cold War threat posed by the Soviet Union. The sheer quantity of nuclear warheads held by both the United States and the Soviet Union ensured destruction of both countries should war break out. It was a clear-cut world of super-power war equals total destruction. In a perverse way, the potential of total destruction for both countries actually made both countries safer. Additionally, the two super powers had much success in keeping their allies/surrogate nations in line. Since the end of the Cold War, a mere 16 years ago, the national security environment became much more volatile, difficult, and complex. No longer can we afford to concentrate our nuclear strategy on one enemy. Events on the Arabian Peninsula continue to shape U.S. nuclear weapons strategy. With Iran essentially "thumbing its nose" at the world regarding its nuclear program, the question for U.S. decision makers is whether U.S. diplomacy will succeed in ensuring Iran remains a nuclear weapons-free nation. This paper will review current U.S. nuclear weapons policy, Iran's nuclear program, and the possible road ahead for the U.S. with respect to dealing with Iran.

The United States' greatest security threat now comes not from our traditional Cold War enemies but from rogue/failing states and non-state actors (terrorists) using weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Our national security is jeopardized far more by these "failing states" than by national armies, navies and air forces. The Islamic Republic of Iran (from here forward referred to as Iran) and North Korea are currently our gravest threats. The North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Il, is someone who the United States (U.S.) will eventually be forced to deal with either on diplomatic terms or via military force. Equally dangerous is the risk from modern nuclear technology in the hands of a few radical Islamic fundamentalists who are unwavering in their desire to kill Americans (or Westerners) and destroy our way of life. President George W.

Bush's policy is straightforward in regards to these threats. He knows these threats must be defeated in order to preserve our nation, our allies, and our friends ¹.

Iran and its Nuclear Ambition:

There are several countries - mostly dictatorships with highly repressive regimes - desperately trying to acquire chemical weapons, biological weapons or, in particular, nuclear weapons capability. Some of these countries are now a short time away from having a serviceable nuclear weapon. This activity is not diminishing. It is increasing.

- Prime Minister Tony Blair
March 2003

Iran has desired nuclear power for the previous half century. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran from 1941 to 1979, initiated Iran's nuclear program as far back as the 1960s. The Shah's plan called for as many as 20 nuclear power reactors. The reason stated by the Shah for his pursuit of nuclear power stemmed from Iran's lack of oil reserves. In the late 1970s, the Iranians carped that Iran's entire oil reserves consisted of only 80 billion barrels. Consequently, the Shah argued his country would be out of oil in as little as 25 years. Additionally, Iran's population was growing at a rate of approximately three percent per year. The Shah estimated that Iran's total population by 2000 would be approximately 65 million (actual figure is 68 million in July 2005). He juxtaposed his country's situation with that of Saudi Arabia as evidence for the need of nuclear power. The Saudis have much more oil and a population in the late 1970s of only 5 million people (actual figure in July 2005 is 28 million).² The Iranians claim only to have a desire to copy the Pakistan and India model of energy independence. The Iranians claim that nuclear power will provide independence from any other nation.³ The Shah's reign ended in 1979 and with it much of Iran's nuclear program. Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution until recently, Iran's public nuclear program was not extremely active. Today, the Iranian government wants to build as many as 15 nuclear reactors.

Iran ratified the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1970. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is the UN's nuclear watchdog, and it ensures countries comply with the NPT. It has conducted inspections in Iran since February 1992. Iran's former president, Mohammad Khatami, announced in early 2003 the existence of complex nuclear facilities at Natanz and numerous other cities spread throughout Iran. These facilities are capable of producing highly enriched uranium (HEU). The Iranian president invited the IAEA to visit these sites. During 2003, Mohammad El Baradei, the IAEA leader, and a team of inspectors visited

Iran several times. The IAEA saw evidence of possible weapons production; and in its report, the IAEA gave Iran an ultimatum to divulge all the facts regarding its nuclear ambitions.⁴

More recently, the Iranian government's "official" position is that Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons. However, they make it clear that nuclear power is being pursued. In the early 1990s, Iran had as many as 200 scientists and 2,000 researchers working and studying nuclear energy. In 1992, Iran demonstrated its seriousness regarding the study of nuclear power when 30 students began Iran's first Master's degree program in nuclear engineering.⁵

As recently as 7 April 2005 the then Iranian President Khatami stated that "Iran is ready to give formal guarantees that it will never produce nuclear arms in return for respect for its legitimate right to possess fuel cycle plants under IAEA safeguards." However, he stated the country not only desires, but it has a right to use atomic energy for peaceful purposes. Khatami pledged continued cooperation with the IAEA.⁶ Additionally, in an attempt to demonstrate Iran's more peaceful side, Khatami, speaking on Iraq, called for free and fair elections there. He also stated that Iran desired to have its neighbor secure and stable and declared Iran's willingness to assist Iraq re-establish security "without intervening in its internal affairs."⁷ The UN's IAEA chief, Mohammed El Baradei, continually calls for Iran to completely suspend its uranium enrichment programs.

Iran's government acknowledges the conversion of 37 tons of yellowcake crude uranium into uranium hexafluoride gas. This gas can be enriched for use as nuclear fuel or for use in nuclear weapons. During one IAEA inspection, the inspectors uncovered an unreported centrifuge. The centrifuge is used in the creation of hexafluoride gas (used during the uranium enrichment process). This centrifuge is a breach of the NPT.⁸ The 37-ton conversion could, some experts say, make available ample material for as many as five nuclear weapons.⁹ On 22 September 2004, the Iranian vice president, Reza Aghazadeh, said that uranium gas conversion is "going on successfully." His statement demonstrates Iran's complete disregard of 35 countries who are calling for the halt of this program. A few days later, the IAEA's governing board mandated that Iran bring to an end any further work on uranium enrichment. The board also articulated a growing concern at the continued conversion of uranium into hexafluoride gas. After nearly two years of diplomatic failure, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) voted in Vienna, Austria on February 4, 2006 to send the Iranian nuclear file to the UN Security Council. As expected, Tehran at once threatened to restart uranium enrichment.¹⁰ Iran has made it clear that if the Security Council gets involved, they (Iran) may be inclined to withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Iranian Missiles

When Iran launched a ballistic missile on 26 September 2004, most American policy makers would say it was a very provocative move. The announcement of the launch and delivery of the missile to the armed forces came over Iranian state-run radio. The Iranian Defense Minister, Ali Shamkhani, announced delivery of the missile to his Revolutionary Guards after completion of a large military exercise. The exercise, conducted near the Iraq border, was intended to demonstrate Iran's resolve to defend itself against, what it called, "big powers." The missile is probably the Shahab-3/Kosar. It is not completely clear as to the range of the missile; however, an unnamed Israeli source stated that the missile's range is more than 1,200 miles.¹¹

Some reports indicate that although the Iranians do not currently possess a missile that can range either the eastern U.S. or northern Europe, they aspire to develop one. This intercontinental ballistic missile will be called the Shahab-6.¹² On 17 March 2005 Vice Admiral Lowell E. Jacoby, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that "We judge Iran will have the technical capability to develop an ICBM by 2015. It is not clear whether Iran has decided to field such a missile."¹³

The Shahab-3 launch/deployment still makes a nuclear Iran primarily a Middle East problem. However, when Iran acquires the ability to strike the eastern U.S. or all of Europe a completely new dimension on U.S. and European national security will occur. Some would argue that when they, the Iranians, acquire that capability it will swiftly become a crisis. When Iran can strike the United States as well as every European capital, the American and European peoples will be forced to take wake up to the seriousness of the Iranian threat.

Now, the evil Soviet "bear" of the Cold War is replaced with a fundamentalist government in Iran whose stability has proven to be dubious. Fifteen years of no nuclear threat is now over, and soon the nation with its finger on the "nuclear trigger" is one whose religion promotes flying passenger airliners into buildings. The irony of the current nuclear situation is fascinating. During the Cold War, aspiring nuclear powers would have, in most cases, been stopped by either the Soviets or the U.S. Just over a decade ago the world began spending the "peace dividend." Peace was breaking out all over the world. Shortly, third world countries will possess nuclear weapons and threaten world stability. When Paris or Washington can become another Hiroshima the world will wake up to this clear danger posed by Iran.

Iran's Nuclear Reactor

Iran continues to assert that its nuclear program is being renewed in order to have a civilian energy program. Iran's Bushehr nuclear reactor facility is causing more than a bit of

consternation in the United States and Israel. The reactor is being built under a contract between the governments of Russia and Iran. It is being built where a German reactor was housed during the 1970s.¹⁴ In 1999, during the early stages of construction, the reactor was expected to be online early in 2004. However, in mid-2003, the Russian Atomic Energy Minister, Alexander Rumyantsev, stated the reactor will not open until mid-2006. The holdup may be due to Russia acquiescing to American pressure to slow construction until Iran demonstrates no desire for the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

The U.S. government is completely opposed to Iran's nuclear program. It argues that Iran, who sits over some of the largest oil and gas deposits on earth, cannot have an honest requirement for nuclear power. In addition to construction, the maintenance and security of nuclear reactors are very expensive. Iran is not only enriching uranium, but there is strong suspicion the Iranians are attempting to get plutonium. Additionally, In order to protect their nuclear assets, the Iranians have dispersed their nuclear assets throughout the country.¹⁵ During the Bushehr construction, the Russians have uncovered several nuclear weapons indicators, but the Russians continue, without regard, toward completing the reactor.¹⁶

On 28 September 2004, just two days after Iran's announcement of its launch of its Shahab-3 missile,¹⁷ President George W. Bush clearly articulated his Administration's position regarding a nuclear weapon-equipped Iran. Specifically, he stated "... our position is that they (Iran) won't have a nuclear weapon." Since 2004, Mr. Bush continually repeats his stance regarding his unwillingness to allow Iran to have a nuclear device. The president also stated that he hopes this issue can be handled diplomatically, but "all options are on the table." Shortly after the president's first statement, Iran called for a negotiated resolution to the confrontation facing the IAEA and Iran. However, at the same time, it showed no proclivity to abide by the IAEA resolution calling for Iran to stop its sensitive nuclear activities.¹⁸

The road ahead regarding Iran's nuclear weapons program will be difficult and complex. The president will have to use every element of national power to solve this problem. The two primary means the United States will use are probably the diplomatic and military elements of national power. Diplomatically, the U.S. is in a very difficult position because of Iraq's lack of WMD. The Iranians know that political feelings throughout most of the world are against the U.S. action in Iraq. Therefore, the Iranians will leverage the world's antiwar sentiment against U.S. action on them. They also know that the UN is a plodding organization fraught with problems ranging from a lack of will to an embedded level of corruption. Consequently, the Iranians do not fear its actions. They know the U.S. military is decisively engaged with no hope of disengaging for the immediate future. They know that the predominantly liberal elite world

press will use its power to project a scenario of the “evil American” picking on the unfortunate Iranians who are just trying to provide their people with inexpensive electricity.

Iran watched Iraq for more than a decade “thumb its nose” at the UN and get away without any punishment. Therefore, they understand the UN poses virtually no threat of action. Recently, the IAEA’s director, Mohamed El Baradei, stated that Iran is not developing nuclear weapons. El Baradei is determined to resolve this diplomatically “to avoid going through a similar bitter experience like Iraq.” Mr. El Baradei sees nothing he would classify as “imminent” regarding a nuclear weapons program. However, he has seen Iran attempting to acquire nuclear enrichment technology. Therefore, he says, “we should make use of political and diplomatic means before thinking of resorting to other alternatives.”¹⁹

Militarily, the United States could act unilaterally against Iran. However, currently the president does not have sufficient political capital for a military strike against Iran. The only possible exception for military action is the discovery of an Iranian nuclear weapon “smoking gun.” The intelligence community will have to produce some type of “concrete” evidence specifically showing that Iran possesses nuclear weapons. Otherwise, the UN, world opinion, the Congress, and a skeptical American people will not support a military strike on Iran.

The European Union and Iran

One military option available to the president is a missile strike combined with a bombing raid. A missile strike is an option with serious consequences; but obviously, it is much less drastic when compared to a full military invasion. Such a strike might set Iran’s nuclear program back a number of years. The hope is that a new, more moderate Iranian government could be in power prior to a nuclear rebuild taking place. However, even the president’s staunchest ally, the United Kingdom, is currently against such a raid. In November 2004 the British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, stated that any attack on Iran is “inconceivable.” He added, “I don’t see any circumstances in which military action would be justified against Iran.”²⁰ For the last 17 months Straw has repeated this mantra. As recently as mid October 2005, Straw stated that military action against Iran is, again, “inconceivable.”²¹ Secretary Straw’s message is not only intended for the news reporters, but it is a subtle message for President Bush.

The UK’s shift to a more dovish stance by America’s best friend in the global war on terror is due to politics at home. President Bush survived re-election in 2004, and certainly British Prime Minister Tony Blair played a small part in the president’s victory. Blair’s support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM proved very important for the president. However, in 2005 Prime Minister Blair narrowly survived a tough re-election. Many of his own Labor Party members are

vehemently opposed to the Iraq war. Therefore, in order for him to successfully win a record third term, he distanced himself from President Bush's hard-line stance on Iran.²²

Throughout 2005 European Union (EU), diplomats met with Iranian diplomats in order to negotiate a halt in uranium enrichment. Negotiators from the EU's three most powerful nations (United Kingdom, France and Germany) offered Iran a package of trade and nuclear power plant concessions. The negotiators reached a tentative agreement to halt Iran's nuclear program. Despite this agreement, the IAEA later concluded that Iran's nuclear program continues to experiment with all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle, but the IAEA sees no substantial proof of a nuclear weapons program.²³

The United States government believes severe flaws exist regarding the EU/Iran agreement to a short-term halt in the production of enriched uranium. A major flaw as seen by the Bush Administration is with respect to plutonium production. Uranium may be preferred for its explosive value; however, plutonium can more easily be placed into small missile warheads. Although small, the plutonium warheads can still produce substantial bomb damage (as seen in Nagasaki, Japan on 9 August 1945). It is often preferred to enriched uranium because it takes a smaller amount of plutonium to produce a significant blast. The United States' main concern deals with the site at Arak, Iran. There, they are beginning work on a 40-megawatt heavy-water reactor. This reactor will produce plutonium. By only suspending the enrichment of uranium, the U.S. feels the European diplomats have only dealt with half the problem. Apparently, plutonium was discussed during the negotiations; but in order to get some type of deal with Tehran, the negotiators conceded the plutonium issue.²⁴ With the Arak reactor still under construction, the diplomats preferred to defer the decision for several years rather than force the issue.

The EU's actions seem to undermine United States policy of a nuclear-free Iran. It seems the Europeans have forgotten that strength is the one thing totalitarian regimes respect. European appeasement policies have a history of failure. The appeasement of Hitler in the late 1930s, and Europe's failing to deal with Slobodan Milošević are prime examples of the most dismal failures. The EU's continual acquiescence to the Iranian nuclear program is in some way reminiscent to the September 1938 Munich Agreement where England and France agreed to transfer to Germany the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland. This "diplomatic solution" eventually helped lead to World War II.

Talks between Iran and the EU halted in August 2005 after Iran resumed uranium conversion. By early 2006, worldwide anxiety increased dramatically after Iran resumed nuclear fuel research. However, Tehran continues its mantra of wanting nuclear power only for peaceful

civilian use. The UK Foreign Minister, Jack Straw, said that Iran is failing to meet responsibilities to the world over its nuclear program; however, the Europeans seem to remain far from being ready for a military strike. The three major nations in the EU (Britain, France and Germany) are unwavering in their desire to refer Iran to the UN Security Council. The European Union's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, stated that a military attack against Iran is at present "not in the mind of anyone."²⁵ Only time will tell if working diplomatically with the Iranians is a good idea. This author is dubious about how prudent it is to trust any nation led by a fundamentalist Islamic regime.

China and Iran

On 6 November 2004, China's Foreign Affairs Minister, Li Zhaoxing, said that his nation opposes the transfer of Iran's nuclear file to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In true diplomatic fashion, Li remained ambiguous regarding whether China would veto any attempt by the United States to move the file to the UNSC. When questioned by journalists about using its UNSC veto power, he said... "Veto cannot be used excessively since there are special limits to that." Of the five permanent UNSC members, China uses its veto power the least. It tends to veto only when an issue directly affects its own national interests (such as Taiwan).

On 25 November 2004, Iran's lead IAEA negotiator, Seyed Hossein Mousavian, concluded a two-day visit in Beijing, China. He was there to obtain Sino support in the event the United States brings the issue of Iran's nuclear weapons development program to the UN Security Council. Mousavian told journalists in China:

Iran will never be prepared to completely dismantle its nuclear program... Iran is prepared to give all assurances that uranium enrichment activities will never be diverted. That's why we should have the right for peaceful nuclear technology and that this right should be exercised with no discrimination. That's why dismantlement is out of the question.²⁶

Despite Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui expressed resistance in bringing the Iran issue to the Security Council, the issue now resides there. It is uncertain that China will use its veto power, abstain or support any American/European led move calling for action against Iran. The chief reluctance of the Chinese to veto a U.S. issue in the UNSC stems from the fact that China trades somewhere near a thousand times more with the U.S. than with Iran.²⁷

China's robust economy is developing an insatiable requirement for oil. Currently, China is the world's second largest importer of oil and receives approximately 14% of it from Iran.²⁸ Besides Iran, China purchases oil from Australia, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, and Venezuela.

Considering Iran is not China's major oil supplier, they may be less reluctant to veto a UNSC action. However, China's investments in Iranian oil have drawn criticisms that contend the Chinese are subverting the diplomatic process of ending Iran's nuclear ambition.²⁹

In March 2006, the Chinese are expected to sign a \$100 billion oil field development plan with Tehran. They are contracting to develop the large Yadavaran oil field. They will also purchase ten million tons of liquefied natural gas yearly.³⁰ Despite this development, Tehran University's Professor Hermidas Bavand believes that even with the \$100 billion natural gas agreement between Iran and China, it is not a certainty that China is willing to team with the Iranians and veto a UNSC move.³¹

Russia and Iran

Russia is currently providing assistance to Iran with the building of the Bushehr nuclear reactor. The United States has had a long running opposition to Russia's support of this reactor. The Bush Administration has had very little success in persuading Russia to discontinue its support.

After several early 2004 terrorist attacks in Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to stand with America against all forms of terrorism. Then Chechen rebels conducted a September 2004 terrorist attack on a Russian school that killed at least 350. This terrorist act provided the U.S. with a "window of opportunity" to convince the Russians of the insidiousness of the world-wide terrorist threat. However, the U.S. failed to persuade Putin and the Russian people that the Iranians may one day provide a nuclear device or technology to Chechen rebels fighting Putin's government. Consequently, Russian support for the Bushehr reactor may one day come back to haunt Russia in the form of nuclear terrorism.

Following the 25 November 2004 Iranian announcement in Vienna, Austria regarding suspension of their uranium enrichment program, President Putin stated,

We welcome Iran's statement that it will not produce nuclear fuel cycle technologies. Today's statement by Iranian officials on this issue requires further discussion. I hope that all these issues will be closed at the expert level. In any case, we think that serious progress has been made in efforts aimed at closing the Iranian nuclear dossier.³²

In 2005, Russia offered to enrich uranium for Iran. Conducting the enrichment on Russian soil provides a method to provide Iran with its requirements for a nuclear power reactor, but it does not provide them with a crucial ingredient for a nuclear weapon. Thus far, the Iranians are unwilling to participate in such a program.

The Russian leadership seems very eager to get the Iranian nuclear issue resolved without Security Council sanctions or by the force of arms. Russia's need for hard currency, a warm-water port, and Russian oil supplies certainly play a part in Russia's laissez-faire attitude when dealing with Iran. Additionally, Moscow is approximately 1,328 nautical miles from Tehran³³ and current Iranian missile technology cannot strike Moscow. Therefore, the cash-starved Russians currently do not have the same security concerns regarding a nuclear-armed Iran. When Iran does develop a long-range missile capable of reaching Moscow, the Russian position may change. However, by then it will be too late.

Israel and Iran

It is nearly impossible to have any type of intellectual discussion regarding a Middle East peace issue without the inclusion of Israel. From its inception, Israel has been a "lightning rod" for trouble in that region. In the Arab world, American foreign policy is seen as favoring Israel over all other nations in the region. Therefore, when the United States calls for the elimination of nuclear weapons in Iran, others in the Middle East and many Europeans ask why Israel can keep its nuclear weapons.

Israel's angst regarding an Iranian attack increased dramatically in October 2005 when Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's made remarks stating that Israel should be "wiped off the map."³⁴ Ahmadinejad's comments sparked international condemnation. It even caused the usually anti-Israel U.N. Security Council to rebuke the Iranian leader. Then in December 2005, he said that the Jewish state should be moved to Europe. Iranians counter by saying their president's remarks are merely rhetoric used in Iran on nearly a daily basis.

Mohamed El Baradei believes that abolishing Israel's nuclear arsenal is vital to permanent peace in the Middle East. Elimination is, in El Baradei's opinion, the key element of an all-inclusive negotiation process that will possibly solve the dispute over Palestine. He told the Sydney, Australia Herald... "You have Israel sitting with nuclear weapons capability there while everyone else is part of the non proliferation regime."³⁵ Israel's nuclear stockpile creates a tremendous amount of resentment among Muslims.³⁶ He also called upon Israel to become one of the nations abiding by the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. He expressed a desire to host a Middle East meeting of non proliferation of nuclear weapons in the presence of Israel.³⁷

Senior leaders throughout the Israeli government are tremendously concerned with the threat posed by Iranian nuclear weapons ambition. Development of an Iranian long-range nuclear warhead delivery system concerns both Israel and the United States. Former Secretary of State, Colin Powell told reporters in late 2004 that he had "seen some information that would

suggest that the Iranians have been actively working on delivery systems.”³⁸ A major fear with the Iranian acquisition of nuclear warheads is its close relationship with the Lebanese-headquartered terror group Hezbollah. This is especially true since Hezbollah’s 2004 successful incursion into Israeli airspace with an unmanned aerial drone.³⁹

Israel could decide on unilateral military action as it did in 1981 when the Israelis conducted an air attack on Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor. The fallout of an attack today will surely have the same effect of regional destabilization that occurred in 1981. Ironically, Iraq’s leader at that time, Saddam Hussein, used the Israeli attack as propaganda in order to justify his continued war with Iran.⁴⁰

Certainly, a unilateral attack is feasible, but execution of such an attack against an Iranian target is wrought with daunting challenges. At the tactical level, these challenges include getting to the target, destroying the target array, and safely returning home. At the strategic and operational levels, Israel will face almost certain reprisals from Iran as well as other Islamic terrorist groups; they will face almost universal, worldwide condemnation; and the already strained relations between Iran and Israel would be destroyed for decades.⁴¹ Another negative factor facing planners is Iran’s ability to repair/rebuild anything destroyed in an Israeli attack. Military action as well as non-action has considerable risk for Israel; and as Iran develops and fields long range ballistic missiles, the danger only increases.

Conclusion

Just prior to the end of the twentieth century, relations between Iran and many European nations began moving in a positive direction. The then Iranian president, Khatami, visited both Rome and Paris. In a stunning policy reversal, the Iranian government no longer targeted Salman Rushdie (author of *The Satanic Verses*). England restored official relations and sent an ambassador to Tehran. The relationship between the United States and Iran seemed to be proceeding in a positive direction when in January 1998 Khatami called for a “dialogue of civilizations.” For a time, relations between the two adversaries warmed. The countries even permitted wrestling matches with their country teams; we were less restrictive with travel between the two countries, and we allowed the trade of pistachios and carpets. However, the relationship soon took a step back when Iran’s religious leaders voiced displeasure and when the United States demanded a change in Iran’s policies on Israel, nuclear weapons, and terrorism.⁴²

A nuclear-armed Iran poses a serious threat to U.S. and international interests. The U.S. State Department continually identifies Iran as “the world’s most active supporter of terrorism.”⁴³

Iran reportedly funds, trains, and arms several terrorist factions throughout the world including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah. The Iranian government has also established links with the terrorist network al-Qaida. Although Iran may not overtly share WMD technologies with these terrorist groups, the U.S. cannot discount such a possibility. The more likely scenario is that Iran could use nuclear weapons to deter any major retaliation while increasing its support and funding of terrorism throughout the world.

One possible solution is to provide covert support for anti-government organizations working both in and out of Iran. One such organization is the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO). The MKO was established in the 1960s by Iranian college-educated youth. They wanted to offset a perceived Western influence in the Shah's government. The group currently has several thousand members located in Iraq with a widespread overseas organization.⁴⁴ Although the MKO is an anti-western organization, it is the only entity that is overtly fighting the Iranian government.

However, supporting such a radical movement is not without risk. Some would categorize such support as a gamble. The Afghanistan Taliban's ascension into power following the withdrawal of the Soviets is a lesson that should not be forgotten. The Taliban filled a power vacuum when the Soviets evacuated. The Taliban fundamentalist Islamic regime then became a hotbed and safe harbor for the world's worst terrorist groups. If the MKO succeeds in taking power and they are left unchecked, Iran could transform into a Taliban-like regime. Thus, the U.S. will have traded one problem for possibly a greater problem.

Despite the Iranian Government's anti-American stance, many of the Iranian people have developed a pro-American attitude.⁴⁵ A better course of action for United States foreign policy may be to coalesce the Iranians' pro-American viewpoint. This may be difficult in Iran's closed religious, autocratic society; but the attempt may certainly be worth it. Although the television cameras continually show Iranians chanting "Death to America" or "Death to Bush," there is an underlying current of pro-Americanism traveling through the younger generation Iranian. The ruling Iranian mullahs must find it incomprehensible when they hear Iran's youth want more American culture. A goal of U.S. political leaders should be to exploit this pro-American view.

Our government's leadership may be able to exploit this view by employing a more effective use of information. The power of information is one element of national power that remains seemingly dormant in our Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Since 1942, the Voice of America (VOA) has spread the word of freedom. Since July 2003 VOA has beamed Farsi-language radio and television programs into Iran; however, the Cuban government immediately began jamming the U.S. broadcasts.⁴⁶ This VOA branch should have the most powerful

radio/television transmitters and counter-jamming equipment available, and it should continue to bombard Iran with a pro-American/pro-democracy message on a non-stop basis. Its primary objective should be to counter Aljazeera's continual anti-American message while spreading the voice of freedom.

CIA supported dissident groups coupled with an effective information campaign may be an effective method of speeding up the loss of power by the ruling mullahs. The U.S. should work rapidly to insert human operators on the ground into Iran. These operators should be doing all they can to stir up anti-government rhetoric throughout the entire country.

An effective information campaign coupled with covert operators working with dissidents will not produce results overnight. It is a long term approach where measuring success is difficult. Such a campaign could fester on for years without any real signs of progress. However, if it is successful, America will eventually have a powerful and friendly Iran as an ally instead of a bitter enemy.

Limited combat operations are probably not a good idea. Iran is a very large country, and its leadership has effectively dispersed its nuclear weapons production facilities. American or Israeli combat operations could quickly turn a pro-American Iranian youth into a flag-burning mob member. The Iranian pro-American view is fragile, and it can easily be crushed by the weight of Iranian nationalism. Such nationalism would certainly thrive in the aftermath of an attack. Major combat operations are out of the question given our current commitment in Iraq. In the past, "saber rattling" by the U.S. was sometimes successful. Nations throughout the world knew we had the military might to back up any political stance the president took. Libya saw this in the early 1980s when President Reagan quickly transitioned from saber rattling to air attacks. However, after not finding WMD in Iraq, the success of such a tactic today is very dubious.

It has taken nearly a decade for us to grasp an accurate picture of our new enemy. Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the U.S. can no longer exclusively rely on a reactive position. No rational person can argue that a nuclear-armed Iran will not be a serious detriment to U.S. and international interests. Our incapacity to deter a would-be attacker, the immediacy of today's threats, and the degree of potential destruction caused by our enemy's weapons do not allow us to wait while an enemy acquires nuclear weapons. We must act as the storm gathers, not after we are struck by the lightning. Unfortunately, the failure of U.S. forces to find WMD in Iraq; an ineffective, incompetent, and corrupt UN; and domestic politics all combine to make any course of action that prevents Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons nearly impossible.

With the help of China, Russia, the EU, world media, and the UN, Iran is being provided one of the military's fundamentals of reconnaissance. They are providing Iran's nuclear program reaction time and maneuver space. It is not a question of whether Iran will get nuclear weapons; it is a question of when will nuclear weapons become operational and what will be the type and capabilities of the delivery system/systems. Once a nuclear weapon is operational, it will, no doubt, be under the control of the militant clerics' private army known as The Revolutionary Guards Corps.⁴⁷ The Guards are separate from the Iranian Army, and it is fraught with religious zealots.

During the AY 2005 at least two senior Army leaders stated they believe it is "only a question of time" before a nuclear device is detonated in an American city. One officer stated during a speech that it will take some type of "cataclysmic event" to rally the world. Almost invariably, the so-called "cataclysmic event" is coming to a city in the United States or Europe. It goes well beyond unfortunate when we consider that only after such an event will the world gather the courage to disarm rogue nations.

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